

# Menelik, "Conquering Lion," Merchant Prince

**Y**OU talk about your merchant princes in this country, your coal barons and your steel kings, and all the rest of them," said the man who had just returned from big-game shooting in Africa, "but if you want to find a real, genuine merchant prince you must go to Abyssinia and introduce yourself to Menelik."

Menelik is the greatest of royal traders. As a trust magnate he can give American industrial promoters cards and spades. Throughout Abyssinia he is a whole trust in himself. He controls not one industry or one line of trade, but every industry and every line of trade.

There is no autocrat on the face of the earth more despotic than he, and he isn't in the king business for his health. He works it for all it is worth. He runs stores and factories, buys the products of the natives at his own price and sells his European imports to them for whatever he chooses to ask.

There is no nonsense about interstate commerce or restraint of trade with Menelik. He is the one great merchant for the whole country, the buyer of all that goes out and the seller of all that comes in.

Anybody can compete with the king, if he cares to try. Menelik does not object. He might send a file of soldiers and haul his trade rivals off to jail, if he chose; but he prides himself on being a civilized monarch, and he has a better scheme than that.

He is the tariff commission as well as the lord high everything else in the country, so he can charge what customs dues he likes on the goods that his rivals import, and exempt his own goods from similar duties. If, tired of importing, they try to become exporters, he puts them out of business with export duties, until they are glad enough to sell their stuff to him for whatever he cares to pay.

No other merchant on earth has such a sure profit as this dusky potentate, and naturally he is a millionaire many times over. The dollars come rolling in to him all the time, but he is very liberal in spending them for the good of his people.

Menelik is probably the only monarch in existence who is also a great merchant with a personal monopoly of the commerce of his country. Most kings think trade derogatory, but Menelik holds different views, though he has a pedigree as long and a title as proud as any of them. He claims lineal descent from King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, and his royal title is "Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah, Menelik, Appointed of God, Negus of Shoa, and Negus Nagast (King of Kings) of Ethiopia." Imagine that title on the front of a store!

But though Menelik has such a giant's power in matters of commerce, as in everything else in his country, he does not use it as a giant. When he buys goods from his people, or sells to them, he fixes fairly reasonable prices. He has sense enough not to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs. He knows that if he paid unreasonably low prices the people would produce little or nothing for export, and that if he charged absurdly high prices the consuming powers of the population would approach the vanishing point in regard to foreign imports.

It seems strange that a king who won his despotic power as an invincible warrior should use it as a shrewd merchant—and it is the stranger because he is a man who cares nothing for wealth or luxury. He lives as simply as he did in the days of his youth, when he owned nothing save his horse and his spear. But Menelik is a far-seeing, many-sided man.

After the Italian invasion of Ethiopia—you must never call it Abyssinia in the country, for the Abyssinians loathe the name—most of the natives succumbed to a severe attack of "swelled head." They had crushed the Italians and they thought they could easily do the same to any other invaders, white, black or brown, at any time.

But Menelik did not catch the prevailing epidemic. He knew something of the power of the white nations, and also their land hunger. He saw the slow, relentless advance of the English through the Soudan, and the partition of many African kingdoms among the European powers.

"At any moment," he reasoned to himself, "I may have to face a far more serious attack. I must have money to arm my troops as the white men are armed. I must buy cannons and hundreds of thousands of rifles. There is only one way to get the money I need. I must take all the trade and commerce of my country into my own hands, and make all the profit there is to be made. It will not be too much for my needs, and it will be better for my country than letting white men make it and take it away to Europe with them."

This was, confessedly, his far-sighted scheme. Some people may think it was economically unsound; but it seems to have answered to perfection. His people stand ready today to meet an invader ten times more formidable than that of the Italians, and give the invaders a very warm reception.

Europe knows all this, and as a result Menelik, King of Kings of Ethiopia, is

the only African monarch for whose alliance European powers eagerly compete, and who treats with them on a footing of fearless equality. So proud is he that he will not permit the Russian, French and Italian representatives at his capital to fly their national flags over their residences. The only foreign flag that floats at Addis Ababa is the British. The British representative hoisted it, as a matter of course, and bluntly refused to haul it down when the Abyssinians remonstrated. Menelik recognized in him a kindred spirit, and told his officials to let the flag stay. The other foreign envoys asked permission, and were sternly refused.

Some foreign envoys have been very unfortunate in their dealings with Menelik. They made the mistake of regarding him as nothing more than an ignorant savage, who could be bamboozled and flattered into anything.

It is the custom in Abyssinia for all foreign missions to bring presents to the Negus. The French brought a lot of Parisian mechanical toys—sheep that squeaked, pigs that ran about on their hind legs, and dolls that talked. They thought such things would be certain to tickle the fancy of a dusky king.

Menelik looked at them for a moment with disgust and rage, then he thrust them aside.

"Do you think," he asked, "that I am a child or a savage, that I should delight in toys?"

The Russian and English emissaries showed a truer insight into his character. They brought him Mauser pistols, revolvers and the latest and best rifles they could buy. He was delighted.

"These are gifts worthy to be received by a warrior and a king," he declared.

The influence of the Russians and English over Menelik dates from that lucky incident, but the French have always been badly represented at his court. After Kitchener's victory at Omdurman, the French at Addis Ababa assured Menelik that the English had been beaten, with the loss of 18,000 men. When he heard the truth later, that Kitchener had crushed the Dervishes with the loss of only 33 of his soldiers, he exclaimed in disgust, "What liars they are!" Since then he has never believed a word the French envoys have told him, and he always speaks of them with contempt.

Menelik is a truthful, straightforward, daring monarch, and he likes men of his own type. His fine qualities were shown in the dispute which participated his war with Italy and in the war itself.

Count Antonelli, an Italian envoy, wanted him to sign a treaty giving Italy a protectorate over his country. For hours the count sat in conference with Menelik, proposing clause after clause of that treaty, only to have each one rejected in turn. At last, in despair, he said, "Will you propose something then?"

Queen Taitu, Menelik's consort, who had sat silently by his side during the negotiations, replied:

"Yes, there is only one treaty which the emperor of Ethiopia will make, and it needs only one clause. He will bind himself to the king of Italy never to give one inch of his territory to any foreign nation, and never to grant a protectorate to Italy or any other European nation."

"That means war," said the Italian.

"I know it," replied Menelik, "but the queen has spoken my mind. Go back to your king and tell him I am ready for the worst he can do."

The story of the war that followed is well known. All the world is aware that Menelik proved himself a capable general and a born leader of men, but few people know of the humanity which he displayed at the great battle of Adua, in which the Italians were utterly routed. With immense labor, he organized rough field hospitals and surgical help for the wounded of both sides. He went personally into the thick of the battle and brought in many wounded men under fire. The Italian prisoners, of whom he took great numbers, had no cause to complain of their treatment. He even gave them pocket money to spend while they were on parole in his camp.

That war established Menelik's right to be regarded as a civilized monarch, at all events for the purposes of warfare, and in recognition of his humanity Abyssinia was admitted as a party to the Geneva convention, with the cordial consent of Italy. Since then, Abyssinian troops have fought side by side with British soldiers against a common foe—the Mad Mullah—and the British officers have had nothing except praise for their courage and discipline.

Menelik's character commands admiration, and nearly all the Europeans who have visited him speak of him with enthusiastic praise. Even the European merchants, who have gone to his country to invest their money and have been put out of business by his practical monopoly are constrained to admit that personally he is an extremely decent fellow. Among his own people he is as popular as any king could be. He rules them as a despot, but he is the most benevolent of despots.

Years ago there was a long and terrible famine in Abyssinia. A pest killed off the cattle, on which the Abyssinians mainly depend for food, as they are the greatest

meat eaters on earth. For three years, while the famine lasted, Menelik would eat no meat.

"Why should I enjoy plenty," he said, "while my people are starving?"

He formed large camps of his soldiers in the districts worst afflicted by the famine, and made the soldiers till the soil to provide food for the starving people. At first the soldiers scorned the work, but the emperor went around to the camps and sowed and plowed with his own hands, until he taught them the nobility of the task.

In the days of his youth Menelik was a great fighter. He won his kingdom by the sword, and his title of "Conquering Lion" is no idle boast. Since he became Negus Nagast he has put down many formidable risings on the part of the rases, or feudal chiefs, and has defeated, besides the Italians, the Egyptians, the Gallas, the Mahdists, the Mad Mullah, and many other formidable foes.

As the result of a stormy career, he has welded a set of quarrelsome tribes into a strong, united nation. Now, he wishes nothing better than to rule in peace and set his people's feet in the path of progress.

Menelik is a wonderfully active man. No detail of administration is too small for his attention if he thinks it will tend to the benefit of his people.

He rises at 3 every morning and goes at once to service in his chapel, for he is a devout Christian. He belongs to the Abyssinian branch of the Coptic church, and is well informed on theological subjects. Nevertheless, he will not submit to priestly domination, and he has materially curbed the power of the priests, to the great advantage of his country. If a sermon is too long for his fancy he tells the preacher to stop, like Prince Ferdinand of Bulgaria.

At 6 a. m. he receives his secretaries and starts work. After he has transacted government business he becomes a judge and hears any pleas which may be brought before him. He is accessible at all times to his people, to listen to their grievances and redress their wrongs. His judgments are full of keen insight. "He is as good a judge as his ancestor, King Solomon," an Englishman once declared enthusiastically.

Menelik is fond of going about among his people in disguise, as the Caliph Haroun-al-Raschid did, to find out their real complaints to listen to their grievances and to see whether his officials are doing their duty. Many stories are told of his adventures in this character, and of the swift, picturesque justice that he has dealt out to the oppressed and the oppressor.

Once he found a high official mercilessly beating a slave. He snatched away the whip and flogged the master until the latter fainted with pain. Next day he decreed that for a year the official should be the slave of his slave. The sentence was duly carried out. At the end of the year Menelik made inquiries and found that the slave had not abused his power over his former tyrant. Thereupon, he set the slave free and gave him a high position in the government service.

Europeans who visit Menelik are surprised to find that he knows all about them and their affairs and motives before they tell him anything. That is due to the elaborate system of espionage which he maintains throughout his country and at the adjacent seaports through which travelers have to pass.

An Englishman came to him once to seek for concessions. Menelik knew what he wanted, but asked courteously:

"What is the motive of your visit? Why have you come so many thousands of miles from your country?"

Thinking he would be diplomatic, the Englishman replied that he wanted to meet a great monarch of whom he had heard much.

Menelik turned from him coldly.

"There are already too many liars in my country," he said. "You must leave Addis Ababa in an hour, and never return."

But straightforward Europeans are warmly welcomed by the Negus Nagast and treated with courtesy and kindness. He surprises them by his knowledge of western affairs, not only of politics, which he might be expected to study, but also of science and general matters.

When Rennell Rodd visited him to conclude a treaty on behalf of Queen Victoria, Menelik discussed the art of medicine and surgery as if he were a doctor and expressed regret that among his numerous presents, Mr. Rodd had not brought an X-ray apparatus. Menelik entertained the envoy and his companions at lunch, giving them a real European meal served on fine china as correctly as at a London club. But the king fed abstemiously on raw beef and stale bread, which are all he ever eats.

Menelik stands about five feet ten inches high and looks shorter because of his great breadth of shoulders. He is dark in face and his features are negroid and decidedly ugly. He has, however, a frank, open, intelligent countenance, a pleasant smile and a courteous, winning manner. He is only 38 and probably has many more years of kingship before him. He has no heir, and when he dies Abyssinia, in the opinion of European travelers, will almost certainly fall back into chaos. He is about the only

man in the country who really desires civilization and progress.

Menelik himself ascribes much of the success of his government to the wise counsel of his consort, Queen Taitu. Her sturdy stand against Italy is only one of many brave, patriotic deeds. Menelik is her fifth husband, but they are a very devoted couple, although she is now over 50 and weighs nearly 300 pounds.

## A Blazed Tree Witness

A boundary tree, blazed when the government was making the first survey of Mariposa county, Cal., twenty-seven years ago, and whose markings have long been practically obliterated, was discovered recently after several months' search and the claims of valuable mining property near it definitely settled. Although the bark had grown entirely over the markings, the letters and figures made by the government surveyors were easily read on the inner surface of the bark when it was removed and on the wood of the tree.

When the first government map of Mariposa was in preparation the surveyors, according to the usual custom, marked the positions of intersecting lines bounding sections and townships on blazed spots on trees. A blaze is made by chipping into the side of a tree, removing the bark and making the exposed surface smooth. On the tablet thus made the numbers of section, township and range are carved with an awl and the tree thus serves for years as a guide post to all who are able to read its cabalistic signs.

The particular boundary tree referred to was blazed: "R. T. S. 14, T. 58, R. 18e." This meant: "Boundary tree, section 14, township 58, range 18 east," and established the existence of a line which went down on the government maps.

Years passed and a prospector came that way, located a claim, did a little development work and went away. As the seasons went on the bark grew over the blaze on the tree and later fiber also grew over the bruised place and healed the wound, leaving at length nothing but a seam on the bark of the oak to mark the place where the blaze had been made.

Not many years ago the man who had located the claim near the blazed oak returned to his hole, picked up a few rich specimens, put his claim on the market and, shortly afterwards, sold.

A company took hold and developed a splendid mine within a few yards of the line dividing the claim from a neighboring property. They pushed developments and uncovered a good ledge, when the parties owning the land immediately adjoining them brought suit for possession. They presented the claim that the mine was on their side of the dividing line, claiming that a mistake had been made as to the position of that line and that the prospector had sold property that was not his in addition to his own.

Maps, figures, estimates and surveyors were brought in as evidence. The court remained in doubt. The tree marking the dividing line in that old survey must be found.

Both contestants set out on the search. Months passed, and at length a scar was discovered on the side of a large oak about six feet from the ground. Above and below this scar a deep cut was made with an ax and the slab was pried off. The bark had grown into the markings, and when the slab was split off these initials stood out in relief perfect to the smallest detail. The bark was presented and admitted as evidence, the line was thus fixed and judgment given to the mining company. The deed given by the prospector was cleared and thousands of dollars a year insured to the developers by the mute testimony of this piece of work actually written by the hand of nature.—San Francisco Examiner.

## Pointed Paragraphs

If you want to know anything about club life ask a policeman.

A good many spirit manifestations come after a visit to the bar.

His satanic majesty takes off his hat every time he meets a hypocrite.

Women are more forgiving than men because men need more forgiving.

Some men will work harder to get a divorce than they will to support a wife.

Any man is liable to make mistakes but it is the other fellow who blunders.

One reason why fat men are good natured is because good natured men are fat.

Husband and wife are seldom one unless one or the other happens to be the whole thing.

There is no earthly hope for the man who is color blind if he is unable to tell a greenback when he sees it.

The fair sex should remember that food and flattery is a combination calculated to open the average masculine heart.

A physician says that the stomach has nothing to do with seasickness. Perhaps he is right, but seasickness has a good deal to do with the stomach.—Chicago News.